

The Washington Merry-Go-Round

It Should Curb Its Security Risks

By Drew Pearson and
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The congressional punishment of Rep. Adam Clayton Powell, the toughest in the last 100 years, has set laudable standards which must be applied to other Congressmen, whether white or black.

One committee chairman to whom the standard must be applied is Rep. Mendel Rivers, (D-S.C.), who as chairman of the House Armed Services Committee and a watchdog of the CIA listens in the Nation's most sensitive secrets.

Rivers, however, is a security risk. He can be trusted with a secret no longer than it takes him to gulp down a few jiggers of bourbon.

Rivers' flowing white hair and thin, dissipated face might have come from the pages of a William Faulkner novel. He is a charming, likable person. But he simply cannot hold his liquor. This is a personal tragedy, which might have remained a whisper in Charleston's fashionable drawing rooms except that he has made it a national problem.

For he is briefed not only by Central Intelligence, but by the Defense Department on the most super-secret matters. If he weren't a powerful Congressman thrust into a key chairmanship by sheer seniority, he couldn't get a security clearance for the most minor job in the Pentagon.

We have tracked down vari-

ous witnesses regarding Rivers. They range from the black-water swamps of his native South Carolina to the musty military offices of the Panama Canal; and from Amityville, N.Y., to Houston, Tex. Some are former aides who fear retaliation; others are military officers whose careers would be ruined if they were identified. So we will report the facts without identifying any but pro-Rivers sources.

Most witnesses described the Congressman as charming when he's sober, a terror when he's drunk. One military escort, who had to nursemaid him overseas, recalled the experience as "horrendous."

When Rivers sobers up after an alcoholic binge, said a former aide, he "can't remember whom he has seen or what he has said."

'Roaring Drunk'

"Sometimes we would come into his office and find it strewn with bottles," said a former secretary, "and the safe would be wide open."

On one occasion, he was brought to the home of an employe to keep him out of trouble.

"He was roaring drunk," was the recollection. "We went to bed but left the bottle on the table and the light was left on so he could get his drinks."

Often the Navy would be notified discreetly to send an

ambulance to haul the Congressman to the Bethesda Naval Hospital to dry out. He was also dropped off on other occasions at Alcoholics Anonymous in the hope they could help.

The armed forces always took the precaution of assigning a military escort with a reputation for sobriety as nursemaid to Rivers on his overseas junkets. One escort insisted that the Congressman, who has been able to stay on the wagon for months at a time, behaved like a gentleman.

Others had different recollections. In London, he was found romping through a hotel corridor in his undershorts. Once he got a few drinks under his belt, he also had a disposition to order generals around like bellhops.

Scotch via Air Force

After one overseas wingding, he alerted aides to meet him at the airport. The Air Force plane arrived with no Congressman but with several cases of Scotch he had purchased abroad.

"We were told that the Congressman had become ill and hadn't been able to return home," recalled one aide.

Delacey Shuman, the Congressman's former administrative assistant, when asked about the Congressman's drinking, would say only: "I don't want to discuss his personal

affairs. I handled my business, and he handled his."

An Air Force pilot recalled another time that the Air Force flew 40 cases of whisky from Bermuda for delivery to the Congressman at Charleston.

River's power over military legislation is such that, on at least three occasions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretaries of the three Services and other top generals and admirals took time out from the Vietnam war to fly to South Carolina and pay homage to the House Armed Services Chairman.

Congress spends hundreds of thousands of dollars each year investigating security risks. Yet it permits an alcoholic to preside over the House Armed Services Committee and the CIA Watchdog Committee, privy to the Nation's most vital secrets.

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